



House of Commons Science and Technology Committee

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
COMMITTEE

Engineering in government: follow-up to the 2009 report on Engineering: turning ideas into reality: Government Response to the Committee's Fifteenth Report of Session 2010–12

Second Special Report of Session 2012–13

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Science and Technology Committee

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The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/science>. A list of reports from the Committee in this Parliament is included at the back of this volume.

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in printed volume(s). Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

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The current staff of the Committee are: Dr Stephen McGinness (Clerk); Dr Farrah Bhatti (Senior Committee Specialist); Xameerah Malik (Senior Committee Specialist); Darren Hackett (Senior Committee Assistant); Julie Storey (Committee Assistant); Henry Ayi-Hyde (Committee Office Assistant); and Nick Davies (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Science and Technology Committee, Committee Office, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general inquiries is: 020 7219 2793; the Committee's e-mail address is: scitechcom@parliament.uk.



Second Special Report

On 30 April 2012 the Science and Technology Committee published its Fifteenth Report of Session 2010–12, *Engineering in government: follow-up to the 2009 report on Engineering: turning ideas into reality* [HC 1667]. On 22 June 2012 the Committee received a memorandum from the Government which contained a response to the Report. The memorandum is published as appendix to this Report.

Appendix: Government response

Introduction

The Government thanks the Committee for its report. As set out in the Government evidence to the inquiry, we share the Committee's view that engineering has a critical contribution to make both to the UK economy and to the business of government. It is reassuring that the Committee observed that progress has been made since 2009.

Nevertheless, again as set out in earlier evidence, the Government is not complacent and recognises that there is always scope for improving the effectiveness of how we access and use engineering evidence. We therefore welcome this report as a contribution to that continual improvement.

Turning to the specific comments and recommendations set out in the report:

The engineering community

1. We commend the work of the Engineering the Future alliance in coordinating engineering advice for government. (Paragraph 4)

Like the Committee, the Government commends the engineering institutions for their collective efforts in developing the Engineering the Future and E4E initiatives. These have helped further strengthen the relationships between the engineering community and government and we look forward to continuing to develop these in the future.

The civil service

2. Since the 2009 Engineering report it would appear that progress has been made in recognising the importance of engineering in the civil service. We are pleased that the Government has begun identifying engineers in the civil service, albeit through a self-nominating group. However, it is not clear whether enough engineers in the civil service are being employed in policy development as well as policy delivery and we invite the Government to provide us with a breakdown of the roles of engineers in the GSE community as an indicator. (Paragraph 11)

The Government agrees that engineers and the knowledge and skills they bring have an important place in the civil service workforce. We do not currently hold data on whether

GSE members work in policy development or delivery. The Government Office for Science is currently considering how it can revise the GSE membership survey questions to better understand the different roles scientists and engineers play across government.

3. We welcome the recruitment of a Head of Engineering to the Department of Energy and Climate Change. However, given that few other examples of good practice were highlighted during our inquiry, we are concerned that DECC's recognition of the need for engineering expertise may be the exception rather than the rule across Government Departments. (Paragraph 12)

The Government is pleased that the Committee recognises the changes that DECC has made to embed engineering further in the work of that department. Further examples were set out in the government evidence. Since then we are very pleased to have appointed two more engineers to the community of Chief Scientific Advisers; Professor John Perkins in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Professor Rod Smith in the Department for Transport.

Chief Scientific Advisers

4. We reiterate our predecessor Committee's view that the Government Chief Scientific Adviser should be a Government Chief Scientific and Engineering Adviser, overseeing a Government Chief Engineer, a Government Chief Scientist and a Government Chief Social Scientist. The Prime Minister should give consideration to this proposed structure when considering Sir John Beddington's successor in the post of Government Chief Scientific Adviser. (Paragraph 15)

It remains the Government's position that the role of Chief Scientific Advisers includes the consideration of engineering advice and evidence alongside the full spectrum of the sciences. This is the basis on which the recruitment of the next GCSA is being taken forward.

5. We recognise that it may be economically unfeasible or risk a duplication of effort to appoint Chief Engineering Advisers alongside Chief Scientific Advisers in all departments. However, we consider that in departments where engineering advice is routinely required, the Government should consider appointing a Chief Engineering Adviser instead of, or in addition to, a Chief Scientific Adviser. (Paragraph 16)

The Government effectively agrees with this recommendation and, notwithstanding the titles used, believes that current practice is in line with it. Where there is a significant requirement for engineering advice, engineers are appointed (as recently in BIS and DfT), but the title of the position remains that of Chief Scientific Adviser rather than Chief Engineering Adviser.

Council for Science and Technology

6. We are satisfied that the Council for Science and Technology (CST) has sufficient representation of engineers amongst its membership. However, it is unclear whether the CST adheres to the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (CoPSAC). The Government should clarify this immediately. If the CoPSAC does not apply to the

CST, the rationale must be made clear and a code of practice for the CST should be published. (Paragraph 18)

The Government is clear that the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (CoPSAC) applies to CST as it does to all other government Scientific Advisory Committees and Councils. It is for the relevant department or agency responsible for running each SAC to consider the principles and good practice set out in the Code of Practice in appointments to and the management of that Committee.

CST is sponsored by the Government Office for Science. As Sir John Beddington set out in his evidence to this inquiry, the Government agrees that it is important that the membership should cover a broad range of skills and experience. However, in the case of CST, this is best delivered not by rigidly defining the requirements of each position on the Council, but rather by balancing the different backgrounds and experiences of those that apply. The selection procedure appoints a mix of the best candidates to ensure the Council has a membership with broad representation. Adverts seeking members for CST specified the broad areas in which we were seeking to supplement the membership to maintain overall balance, but did not specify specific posts as requiring, for example, an engineer or a business person. That said, with the creation last year of the four *ex officio* positions for the Presidents of the National Academies, engineering is formally represented; currently by Sir John Parker, President of the Royal Academy of Engineering.

Conclusions

7. Since the 2009 report *Engineering: turning ideas into reality*, the Government and engineering community have made progress in integrating engineering expertise and concerns into the formulation of policy. The formation of the Engineering the Future alliance as a coordinated voice for the professional engineering community and the ongoing efforts of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser in raising the profile of engineering advice are particularly commendable. However, there is no room for complacency and the Government must ensure that engineering continues to have a high profile in policy, and particularly in policy development. (Paragraph 19)

As set out above, the Government is pleased that progress since 2009 has been recognised but agrees with the Committee that there is no room for complacency. It will continue to be an important role of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser and the network of departmental CSAs to ensure that engineering advice is fully considered in the development and implementation of policy.

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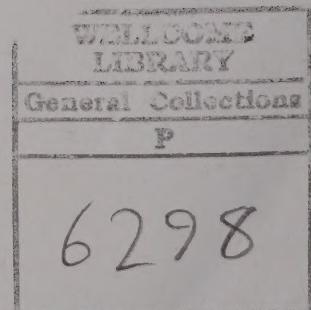
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